Fall Semester, 2010
Psychology 490  Social Interdependence

Instructor: Dr. Kuhlman
223 Wolf Hall
Office: 831-8084
dmkuhlman@gmail.com

Office Hours: TBA

Texts
Poundstone, W. *Prisoner’s Dilemma*.
Komorita, S., and Parks, D. *Social Dilemmas*.

Final Grades Will be Assigned As Indicated Below
"GE" means greater than or equal to; "LT" means less than.

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Seventy percent of your final (letter) grade will be based on the average of your four in-class exams, that will be given on the dates indicated above.

There will be an optional final. If you choose not to take it, this part of your grade will be based on your four in-class exams. If you do take the optional final, this part of your grade will be based on the average of the best 4 (of 5, including the final) exam scores.

Twenty percent of your grade will be based on four short papers, each due on the
date of the 4 exams in this course. You will use the University's electronic journal system to find one recent (published after 2000) empirical (research) article that is relevant to any of the ideas/research you've been reading about or hearing lectures on in that part of the course. You will write a summary of the article, and then discuss how that article relates to what you've been reading about or hearing lectures on. Is it consistent or inconsistent? Does it provide any new perspectives? It is NOT necessary that you select a psychology journal. That's fine of course, but any journal research article that's clearly relevant is quite acceptable. Each paper will be worth 5 percentage points.

Another 10% will be based on attendance. You start the course with 10 attendance points. For each unexcused absence, you will lose 2 points. Thus, it's possible for you to wind up with negative attendance points.

Overview and General Outline of the Class

By definition, two or more people are socially interdependent when everyone cares to some degree (maybe a lot, maybe a little, but some) how everyone acts. The basis for caring is that in socially interdependent relationships what happens to everyone depends on what everyone does.

Over the last 30 to 35 years, many Social Psychologists have been very actively concerned with human behavior in a certain type of interdependent relationship, known most generally as the Social Dilemma, which will be a main theme of this course. Although many types of Social Dilemma have been studied in the laboratory, and (presumably) exist in the real world, they all have one feature in common. Specifically, in any Social Dilemma there is a conflict between two motivational systems: Individualism where the focus is on the well being of the single person and Cooperation where the focus is on the well being of the group as a whole. The nature of the conflict has two features. The first, and most obvious is that Individualistic and Cooperative goals are maximized by different types of behavior. That is, each person must decide how he/she will act: Individualistically or Cooperatively. The second, and less obvious feature of the conflict is what makes Social Dilemmas so interesting to study, and also, what makes them dilemmas. This feature can be captured with the following phrase: Universal individual rationality leads to collective disaster. We'll talk about the meaning of that phrase a lot in the course, but for right now we'll briefly describe its major points. First, in a Social Dilemma, you are guaranteed to do best for yourself if you act Individualistically. This is true for everyone else as well. That would seem to make the choice between acting Individualistically or Cooperatively a no-brainer: be Individualistic. But (and here's the dilemma) if everyone acts in this sensible (rational) way, then everyone is worse off than if everyone had decided to act Cooperatively. So then, maybe it's clear that the best thing to do in a Social Dilemma is to act Cooperatively. But (the dilemma continues) if you act Cooperatively and others do not, then you wind up in really bad shape and the others do very well (at your expense).

We're going to focus on a number of questions/issues surrounding the topic of Social Dilemmas, in the following sequence.

(1) How do social psychologists think (theorize) about these problems? The most common schema used by social psychologists is to view each member of an interdependent relationship as a decision maker. One who must choose between different alternatives, without knowing for sure what the final
consequences of his/her choice will be. (That depends on what the other people do.) The first part of the course will introduce you to the basic ideas of “Game Theory”, which is the most important basis for the development of theory in this area of social psychology. Poundstone’s book (Prisoner’s Dilemma) and the first set of lectures will provide this introduction.

The first exam will cover the material you’ve read in the book and that we’ve covered in lecture dealing with these topics.

Readings for the First Exam all come from Poundstone
Chapter 1: Dilemmas
Chapter 3: Game Theory
Chapter 4: The Bomb
Chapter 8: Game Theory and Its Disconents

(2) What do social psychologists know about the actual behavior of people in social dilemmas? Do they tend to cooperate? What are the features of the situation, and the personal makeup of the individuals that promote or interfere with cooperation? We know quite a bit, and the news is really pretty good: people tend to act rather cooperatively indeed. Not always, and sometimes not at all, but more often than not. The second set of lectures and readings will cover the so-called "experimental gaming" paradigm and review what we’ve learned about situational influences on cooperation. The second exam will cover this material.

Readings for the Second Exam come from both texts:
From Poundstone:
Chapter 6: Prisoner’s Dilemma
Chapter 10: Chicken and the Cuban Missile Crisis
From Komorita and Parks
Chapter 1: Introduction
Chapter 2: The Prisoner’s Dilemma

(3) In the third part of the course we’ll read about and hear lectures on individual differences in the predisposition to cooperate/compete, which comes under the general heading of Social Value Orientation. We’ll also take a look at how psychologists (and others) have approached socially interdependent behavior from an evolutionary perspective. The third exam will cover this material.

Readings for the Third Exam come from both texts:
From Komorita and Parks
Chapter 5: Social Values
From Poundstone:
Chapter 12: Survival of the Fittest

(4) In the final part of the course, we’ll focus on N-person (jargon for more than two person) social dilemmas that on the surface appear to be quite different. One is called the Commons Dilemma, or “Take Some Dilemma”. Here people are free to take things of value (such as water, fish, electricity, etc) from a common source. If the collective amount taken is at or below some threshold, then all is well: people get what they asked for, and the common source is able to "replenish" itself. However, overconsumption damages the common source and its ability to replenish, putting everyone in the group at risk. The other N-person dilemma is called the Public Goods Game, or "Give Some Dilemma". Here, people are asked to contribute something they own (time, money, work) towards the provision of
a "Public Good", such as a park, bridge, public TV, etc. If contributions are adequate, the good is provided and everyone has access to it whether they contributed or not. If contributions are insufficient, the good is not provided, and people who did contribute have wasted their time, money, effort, etc. These two problems appear quite different. However, considerable research suggests that they can be understood in the context of Kahnemann and Tversky's "Prospect Theory" having to do with how the framing of a decision problem leads to risk aversion or risk seeking behavior.

Readings for the Fourth Exam come from Komorita and Parks
Chapter 3: Public Goods
Chapter 4: Social Traps